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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006667

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#) [ECONOMY](#) [AND](#) [FINANCE](#) [ISRAELI](#) [SOCIETY](#)

SUBJECT: BEDOUIN PROFESSOR PESSIMISTIC ABOUT GOI TOURISM PLANS

Classified By: Economic Counselor William Weinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) has several projects in the planning stages designed to improve the Bedouin employment situation in the Negev. Michal Uziyahu from the Negev Development Authority (NDA) said one tourism plan divides the Negev into six regions and calls for the GOI to develop sites highlighting a different Bedouin cultural field group in each area. This plan will be reviewed by a board comprised of the MoT, NDA and Negev community officials, who will meet on November 30. Uziyahu described another plan called the Tourism Greenhouse project, which acts as a hothouse for encouraging entrepreneurs from the Negev to start new tourism businesses in the region. Finally, she touched on a project spearheaded by the private firm of Geo-Teva in the Bedouin village of Derijat, which will showcase the Negev's medicinal and aromatic plants. Aref Abu Rabia, a Bedouin professor at Ben Gurion University working with Geo-Teva was not optimistic about the GOI sponsored tourism projects. He claimed that the GOI is barely investing any money in the Bedouin community and that the Bedouin still suffer from an unemployment rate in the 50 to 60 percent range. END SUMMARY.

GOI's Tourism Plan for Bedouin Employment

2. (C) On November 21, econoff met with Michal Uziyahu, Manager of Tourism for the Negev Development Authority (NDA). Uziyahu said the NDA has a broad set of responsibilities and was created to help generate employment and revenue for the region. She said the NDA reports directly to former Vice Premier Shimon Peres' office.

3. (C) Uziyahu said that a tourism master plan for the Bedouin sector was initiated by the NDA and has now reached the final stage. She indicated that a review panel made up of members from the Ministries of Tourism and Agriculture, former Peres office employees, mayors from various Negev townships, and the Israel Land Authority (ILA) will vote on the plan on November 30.

4. (C) Uziyahu said a private company called Geo-Teva headed by David Meninger, who advises public and private bodies on environmental and tourism issues, was recently hired to spearhead the first project to take place in the village of Derijat in the Arad region. The plan is to give tourists the opportunity to tour gardens consisting of medicinal and aromatic plants. Note: In a related story Geo-Teva is also planning to use the town of Segev Shalom to establish a field school called Darkhei Midbar (Ways of the Desert), which will serve as a center for Bedouin field studies. End Note.

5. (C) She explained that the tourism plan divides the Negev into six regions; sites highlighting a different topic related to Bedouin culture will be developed in each region. She noted that final approval of the plan is required before funding is received from the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), the Jewish National Fund (JNF), and possibly the Ministry of Agriculture and the Jewish Agency.

6. (C) Uziyahu also discussed an umbrella program called the "Tourism Greenhouse," which currently provides business entrepreneurs a chance to initiate projects in the Negev. She said the NDA will pay 75 percent of the consultation fees incurred by individuals seeking to start a business in the region. She said close to fifty Bedouin entrepreneurs have approached her office. She stressed, however, that consultations need to be completed and statutory requirements met before any project can be initiated.

Abu Rabia: GOI Tourism Plans Not Realistic

7. (C) On November 23, econoff met with Dr. Aref Abu Rabia, Chair of the Department of Middle East Studies and Professor of Anthropology at Ben Gurion University in the Negev. Abu Rabia is a Bedouin who lives in the unrecognized village of Kuhla, which has a population of 500 Bedouin and is located 35 kilometers (22 miles) northeast of Beer Sheva. Abu Rabia confirmed his partnership with Geo-Teva's project in Derijat, but said he is pessimistic about the tourism initiative and

other projects designed to improve the dismal employment situation of the Bedouin.

18. (C) When asked why he was critical of GOI efforts to help the Bedouin through tourism, Abu Rabia pointed to the historical land dispute between the GOI and Bedouin, the small amount of money allocated to the Bedouin sector, and the numerous home demolitions in the face of expanding Jewish communities in the Negev. He said that these factors represented major roadblocks to progress.

19. (C) Abu Rabia claimed that the NDA, MoT, and officials from Peres' office responsible for the Bedouin have not invested meaningful amounts of money in the Bedouin community. He cited the Geo-Teva project as an example of a project that has not moved beyond the planning stage due to a lack of funding and infrastructure support. He said that he has addressed the need for funding in previous meetings with private and public officials, but that there has been no response to these calls. He said he met David Meninger three years ago, and NIS 250,000 (USD 55,555) later, nothing has happened. He noted that Meninger and others working with him used the NIS 250,000 for consultations, research and other project related expenses, but none of the amount was used to start the project.

10. (C) He ended the meeting by characterizing the overall GOI approach to the Bedouin employment issue as superficial, claiming that more than 90 percent of all money for Bedouin projects go to non-Bedouin who spearhead projects in the Negev and hire Bedouin as laborers. When econoff noted that these projects created jobs for the Bedouin, Abu Rabia said that it was cheap labor, adding that Bedouin unemployment in the Negev stands at 50 to 60 percent.

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